

Contributions in Black Studies

A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies

Volume 7

Article 2

January 1985

Requiem for Revolution: Perspectives in the U.S. / OECS Intervention in Grenada

William Eric Perkins

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs>

Recommended Citation

Perkins, William Eric (1985) "Requiem for Revolution: Perspectives in the U.S. / OECS Intervention in Grenada," *Contributions in Black Studies*: Vol. 7 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs/vol7/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Afro-American Studies at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Contributions in Black Studies by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

William Eric Perkins

REQUIEM FOR A REVOLUTION: PERSPECTIVES ON THE U.S./OECS* INTERVENTION IN GRENADA

THE GRENADIAN REVOLUTION of March 13, 1979 offended the West Indian adherence to Westminster democracy** and directly challenged U.S. hegemony in its major sphere of influence.*** The People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) led by the vanguard New Jewel Movement overthrew one of the most corrupt, incompetent, and idiosyncratic regimes in the Western hemisphere. The immediate response of the United States was one of cautious approval. As Reagan's Ambassador to the Eastern Caribbean, Sally Shelton, remarked,

It is unfortunate that his (Gairy's) removal was by extra-constitutional means but let's face it—that was probably the only way he would have

*The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States—ed.

**Westminster democracy is characterized by a bicameral legislature with power in the upper chamber; a cabinet system; the existence of a political opposition in the form of parties which functions in extra-political terms when not in power; and elections held at regular intervals—ed.

***This essay is a part of a larger work in progress with the working title, *The Rise and Fall of the Grenada Revolution: Class, Nation and the Theory of Non-Capitalist Development*. I have incurred a number of debts while undertaking the research for this work. Archibald Singham, of Brooklyn College, whose own work on the Gairy regime is extremely important, has been a source of inspiration and encouragement. Johnnetta Cole, of Hunter College, has provided me with a number of hard-to-get sources. Congressmen Ronald Dellums and Mervyn Dymally, along with their staffs, have given me the benefits of their experience in lobbying for the Afro-Caribbean world, while providing me with a number of important documents and insights. Dessima Williams, former ambassador from Grenada to the Organization of American States, shared some of her thoughts and reflections with me. Betty and Herman Liveright, of the Berkshire Forum, allowed me to accompany them on a trip to Grenada and to use invaluable taped dialogues with Don Rojas and Caldwell Taylor. Kathy Halley, of the Congressional Black Associates, provided me with numerous United States government documents, including transcripts of broadcasts from Radio Free Grenada. Finally, Randall Robinson and the staff at TRANSAFRICA opened their files to me.

gone. When the 1979 Revolution occurred, the Caribbean (and many elsewhere) breathed a sigh of relief that Gairy was gone. Many held great expectations, strengthened by the new leadership (the New Jewel Movement), that the trappings of democracy under Gairy would be replaced by a true democratic system and socioeconomic reform. Prime Minister Bishop himself promised national elections and committed himself to improving the conditions of life of the Grenadian people.¹

However, as the revolution attempted to consolidate itself, American tolerance gave way to hostility and that hostility crystallized in a policy of destabilization and ultimately intervention.

To understand the evolution of U.S. policy toward Grenada, it is necessary to examine the development of the revolutionary forces, the contradictions that emerged within them, the underdevelopment of Grenadian society, and the international balance of forces. Essential to the revolution's impact on the English-speaking Caribbean was its linkages to other would-be revolutionary forces in the Windward and Leeward islands—the so-called “backyard” of the United States. In addition, the impact of the Revolution on the large Afro-American population of the United States did not go unnoticed.

Following a series of events during the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s, events including the Rodney affair of 1968 in Jamaica and the mutiny in Trinidad in 1970, many Caribbean islands, from Grenada to Bermuda (the northern most Antillean island) found their youth and intellectuals influenced by the “Black Power” philosophy of Afro-America and the corresponding ideology of Pan-African socialism.² In Grenada, this ideological orientation culminated in the unification of the largest and best known groups of the progressive opposition to the Gairy regime—the Movement for Assemblies of the People (MAP) led by Maurice Bishop and Kendrick Radix, and the Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education and Liberation (JEWEL) led by the rural economist Unison Whiteman. Following their merger in 1973 and a series of incidents leading to the brutal “Bloody Sunday” of November 18, 1973, the

¹ Hearings, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, *United States Policy Toward Grenada*, June 15, 1982 (Washington, D.C.: 1982), pp. 65–66.

² See W. Raymond Duncan, “Caribbean Leftism,” *Problems of Communism*, XXVII (May–June 1978), pp. 33–57; “Rise of Black Power Brings Racial Strife to Caribbean Region,” *The Wall Street Journal* (December 12, 1970); Wade Greene, “Caribbean ‘Black Power’—Will Their Plans Affect Yours?” *The New York Times Travel Section* (Sunday, February 7, 1971); C. L. R. James, “Black Power,” in *Spheres of Existence* (London, 1980), pp. 221–36; and Clive Thomas, “Walter Rodney and the Caribbean Revolution,” in Edward Alpers and Pierre-Michael Fontaine, (eds.), *Walter Rodney, Revolutionary and Scholar: A Tribute* (Los Angeles, 1982), pp. 119–32.

progressive forces began to grow. The New Jewel Movement (NJM) began to organize a broad “national-democratic” front combining all classes—the agro-proletariat, the small working class, civil servants, professionals and the merchant petit-bourgeois. Its ideology was a combination of populism and African socialism. “People’s Assemblies” would replace the adversarial partisan system of Westminster. The economy would be based on the “ujamaa” village system found in Nyerere’s Tanzania. Public services would be socialized, and a non-aligned foreign policy would be adopted.³ It is important to note that the early NJM was not self-consciously Marxist. That would not occur until mid-1975. Following a series of secret meetings held in 1974 and 1975, the NJM proclaimed itself a vanguard party. The Political Bureau, Central Committee, and cadre were reorganized. Centrists were expelled and a Marxist-Leninist ideological orientation adopted. In 1976, Bernard Coard and his wife Phyllis resigned their teaching posts to return to Grenada. The Coards were uncompromising in tilting the NJM toward Marxism. Within the Party, the Coards had formed the Organization for Research, Education and Liberation (OREL)—a study group designed to train cadre in the essentials of Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, and the evidence from the confiscated documents is overwhelming: it was Coard who introduced the “non-capitalist way” into the ideological vocabulary of the NJM. This was important in fomenting the factional splits that would tear the movement apart in 1983.

From 1973 to early 1979, the NJM undertook mass political work, while at the same time creating an armed wing within Gairy’s military and police. This clandestine organizing paved the way for the relatively peaceful insurrection of March 13. Within twelve hours the NJM had completed the takeover. In its earliest days, the PRG swept away the vestiges of Gairyism, suspended Parliament and the Constitution, and proclaimed a revolutionary regime. The PRG had an immense task in rebuilding Grenadian society. An examination of the political economy of the island and the attempt to transform it are essential to review at this point.

Non-Capitalist Development and the Grenadian Revolution:

From its inception, the PRG’s strategy to rebuild the economy was fraught with problems. Grenadian society was first of all a post-plantation economy.

³ The best accounts of the growth of the New Jewel Movement (NJM), are EPICA Task Force, *Grenada: The Peaceful Revolution* (Washington, D.C; 1982), particularly pp. 42–56; and W. Richard Jacobs and Ian Jacobs, *Grenada: The Route to Revolution* (La Habana: 1980), especially pp. 75–88.

More than a third of its economy was devoted to the growth, processing, and exporting of tropical produce—bananas, cacao, and nutmeg. Smallholding was the dominant characteristic of landholding with more than 88% of the holdings concentrated in the less than 1-acre to 5-acre category.⁴ Though the NJM set agricultural reform as one of its top priorities, including the expansion of the agro-industrial sector, collectivization of some farms, confiscation of unused land, investment in rural infrastructure, and the creation of a farmer's union, it tended to ignore the fundamental characteristic of West Indian smallholding. As Patrick Emmanuel noted,

. . . property in the form of land was, for the mass, the reward for emancipation from unrewarded slavery. The very substance of emancipation was enjoyed in the form of the mass experience of control over land. This almost uniquely Caribbean sociology of property produced, over a long period of time, a peasant state of mind or outlook, which is unreceptive to socialist conceptions of collectivization.⁵

Consequently, the implementation of socialized agriculture did not meet with an enthusiastic welcome by the Grenadian peasantry and agro-proletariat. This, in itself, was to act as an impediment to one of the fundamental tenets of the "non-capitalist" way—a mixed economy with the state sector dominant.

The concept of a non-capitalist path to economic development was initially developed by Soviet intellectuals in order to facilitate the transition to socialism in the backward regions of the old Czarist empire. It was later extended to regimes in the Third World—most notably those in Africa, including Algeria, Egypt, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Bernard Coard and OREL made this concept a cornerstone of the PRG through the Central Committee and the Politbureau. The crucial texts were V. Solodovnikov and V. Bogoslovsky, *Non-Capitalist Development: An Historical Outline*, I. Andreyev, *The Non-Capitalist Way*, and R. Ulyanovsky, *Socialism and the Newly Independent Nations*. These texts guided the economic planning of the revolutionary government and served as the ideological cement in terms of cadre education. According to Solodovnikov and Bogoslovsky,

Non-capitalist development is a revolutionary process by which a national liberation revolution gradually and consistently develops into a socialist

⁴The data are distilled from Table 1 in Patrick Emmanuel, "Revolutionary Theory and Political Reality in the Eastern Caribbean," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. XXV (May 1983), p. 210.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 211.

Requiem for a Revolution

7

revolution in countries where the conditions for an immediate socialist revolution have yet matured.⁶

In Grenada, this was certainly the case: both the objective and subjective conditions of the revolution were inherently weak. The duty of the revolutionary party was to accelerate the objective conditions for the economic transition to socialism, while educating the masses ideologically to carry through the transition.

The main features of the non-capitalist way can be summarized in the following manner. First, an anti-imperialist foreign policy involving the dissolution of obligations, treaties, etc. with the imperialist power; the dismantling of foreign military bases; a firm and principled stand against colonialism and racism; support for national liberation movements and a shift to the world revolutionary forces. Second, the abolition of imperial control over the economy, including the nationalization of banking, insurance, tourism, public utilities, etc. Third, the consolidation of the mixed economy with the state and mixed sectors dominant. Fourth, intensified political, cultural and ideological struggle to remove bourgeois and imperial influences. Fifth, the introduction of new attitudes toward work and production. Sixth and finally, the expansion of both the organs of mass participation and political organizations.⁷ Though some of these features were met by the PRG, others were not. An anatomy of those features is essential to an understanding of the contradictions that emerged within the revolutionary leadership.

Soviet theorists and their fraternal critics of the non-capitalist way urge developing revolutionary movements to be cognizant of the

. . . revolutionary potentialities among the petit-bourgeois leadership usually found in these countries (of the Third World) in alliance with the peasantry, proletariat and semi-proletarian classes, and progressive sectors of the emerging national bourgeoisie.⁸

Indeed, in Grenada, as elsewhere in the Third World, the underdevelopment of the traditional proletariat led to the emergence of the intelligentsia as the

⁶ V. Solodovnikov and V. Bogoslovsky, *Non-Capitalist Development: An Historical Outline*, (Moscow: 1975), p. 89.

⁷ This is a summary of the main points argued in Ralph Gonsalves' important pamphlet, *The Non-Capitalist Path of Development: Africa and the Caribbean* (London: 1981), pp. 8-12.

⁸ Clive Thomas, "The Non-Capitalist Path' As Theory and Practice of Decolonization and Socialist Transformation," *Latin American Perspectives*, V:2 (Spring 1978), p. 11; the problems of the West Indian petit bourgeoisie are admirably dissected in C. L. R. James, "The West Indian Middle Classes," in *Spheres of Existence*, pp. 131-40; and the

vanguard force in collaboration with other classes and class fractions. This class alliance, composing a broad national-democratic front, reflected a *political compromise* on the part of the revolutionary leadership. On the other hand, the class origins of the revolutionary intelligentsia presented the revolutionary movement with hidden limitations. Often these intellectuals are beholden to the neo-colonial state apparatus for their salaries or are engaged in petty commerce. The leadership of the NJM was composed of lawyers, university lecturers, and civil servants. Their class origins occasionally conflicted with the objectives they had set for the progress of the revolution, while their vacillation and indecisiveness contributed to a weakening of the revolutionary leadership precisely at the times it faced its greatest challenge—the turmoil during the months preceding the collapse of the revolution in 1983.

Within the economic sphere, the PRG attempted to move the economy along a “non-capitalist” path. Inheriting an economy in a state of stagnation with a negative growth rate and double-digit inflation, coupled with the corruption and mismanagement of the old regime, was no easy task. Three new sectors of the economy were to be developed, following the strategy of non-capitalist development—a public sector, a private sector and a brand new cooperative sector. The public sector was dominated by some thirty state farms, several new agro-processing plants built with Cuban aid and technical assistance, and a state fishing and fish processing industry. Tourism presented the PRG with its greatest economic potential. As Maurice Bishop noted of the new international airport under construction at Port Salines,

... we as a people have agreed that the expansion of our tourism industry is vital to the development of our country. We recognize tourism's importance in creating jobs for those who are still unemployed as new hotels, restaurants, entertainment facilities and shopping areas spring up. We recognize the increased market for our agricultural and agro-industrial products. We see the benefits to our artisans proceeding from the expanded sales of handicrafts and other souvenir items. We also recognize the importance of tourism in offering opportunities for the expansion of our private sector as well as the benefits to the people from the public sector's investments in tourism. In short, the development of our tourism

role of the petit-bourgeoisie in attempting to build socialism in Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana is given an interesting, if not convincing, analysis in Anthony P. Maingot, “The Difficult Path to Socialism in the English-Speaking Caribbean,” in Richard Fagen (ed.), *Capitalism and the State in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Stanford: 1979), pp. 254–301.

industry will bring with it previously unconceived development to our country and benefits to all our people.⁹

Tourism, supported by the new international airport facility, would propel the expansion of the public sector and stimulate rippling effects throughout the economy, but it was the airport that would occupy center stage in the PRG's confrontation with American imperialism. The PRG, leary of nationalization of foreign banks, took over the Grenada Development Bank (GDB) and established the National Commerical Bank to aid small farmers and assist in other development projects.

The private sector was essential to the transitional economy, since the PRG lacked capital and technology, as well as managerial and organizational expertise. Questions concerning the role of the private sector and its ultimate elimination were a bone of contention between the Coard and Bishop forces. Coard, the impatient Marxist, wanted the private sector severely limited, while Bishop, though supportive of the dissolution of the private sector, cautioned against such a drastic move. The debate on the role of the private sector would provide Coard with ammunition during the political crisis of July–September, 1983.¹⁰

The cooperative sector was brand new. Its role, according to Solodovnikov and Bogoslovsky, was to (1) abolish “pre-bourgeois forms of exploitation”; (2) “prevent capitalist tendencies in small-scale production”; and (3) “prepare the socio-economic conditions for the transition from small-scale to large scale production.”¹¹ For Coard, as Minister of Finance, this sector was critical in hastening socialism but for many Grenadians it was anathema. The cooperative sector was the weakest, when it was intended to be the strongest. The NJM's inability to ideologically prepare the Grenadian people for the acceptance of the cooperative sector had severe consequences as the revolution grew weaker. Without substantial mass support for the transition to socialism, economic

⁹ Maurice Bishop, “Against U.S. Sabotage of the Airport Project,” in *Forward Ever! Three Years of the Grenadian Revolution: Speeches of Maurice Bishop* (Sydney: 1982), pp. 165–66.

¹⁰ It was this issue—accelerating the socialization of the economy—that proved to be an important issue during the leadership crisis of September 1983. See *Extraordinary Meeting of the Central Committee of the NJM, 14–16 September, 1983*, transcript of the minutes; and *Extraordinary General Meeting of the Full Members of the NJM, 25 September, 1983*, transcript of the minutes; Colin Henfrey has devoted some attention to this point in an important essay, “Between Populism and Leninism: The Grenadian Experience,” *Latin American Perspectives*, XI:3 (Summer 1984), pp. 15–36 but especially pp. 25–26.

¹¹ V. Solodovnikov and V. Bogoslovsky, *Non-Capitalist Development*, p. 59.

planning failed; as a consequence, the petit-bourgeois merchants and land-holders were able to criticize the PRG's inability to implement this phase of economic reform.

It was in the sphere of social services that the PRG made the most dramatic gains. Education, health, housing, and community services made dramatic strides. Just as in Cuba and Nicaragua, the quality of life of the people improved in the first year. A substantial part of state revenue, foreign aid, Cuban technical assistance, and the NJM program accounted for these substantial gains.

The Politics of the New Jewel Revolution:

The original manifesto of the NJM called for participatory democracy through mass organization. The Grenadian revolution was the first extra-constitutional removal of a government in the British West Indies—and therein lay the problem. Two centuries of British parliamentarianism had been overturned and perhaps this fact, more than any other aspect of the revolution, is what terrified Grenada's neighbors throughout the Caribbean. As in Europe and the United States, the Caribbean had moved to a kind of neo-Toryism. Nowhere was this more evident than in the defeat of Michael Manley's democratic socialism in Jamaica in 1980. The reasons for this stunning defeat are beyond the scope of this paper, but the parallels and similarities of that situation were recalled in the Grenada destabilization campaign, as we shall see.

Most Caribbean governments immediately recognized the revolutionary regime but they wanted it legitimized according to the Westminster model. In response to the calls for elections, Bishop warned,

There are those (some of them our friends) who believe that you cannot have a democracy unless there is a situation where every five years and for five seconds in those five years, a people are allowed to put an "X" next to some candidate's name, and for those five seconds in those five years they become democrats, and for the remainder of the time, four years and 364 days, they return to being nonpeople without any right to say anything to their government, without any right to be involved in running their country. We in Grenada do not regard that as being the real proof of democracy. Instead, we ask ourselves: When decisions have to be taken that are going to affect the lives of the people, are there mechanisms, are there institutions and organizations that allow for the people to participate and to express their views? Are there organizations on the ground that give the people a real opportunity of expressing how they feel and on a daily basis of being involved making decisions about their lives?¹²

¹² Maurice Bishop, "Forward Ever! Against Imperialism and Toward Genuine National Independence and People's Power," in Bruce Marcus and Michael Taber

By the summer of 1981, the mass organization had grown spectacularly. The National Women's Organization (NWO), the National Youth Organization (NYO), the growth and expansion of an already strong labor movement, and the Agricultural and General Workers Union (AGWU) were all designed to facilitate and simulate mass political participation. No doubt these organs of mass participation were modelled on those in Cuba, the mass institutions of *poder popular*,¹³ but that was not their only source. Many West Indian intellectuals had been influenced heavily by the Trinidadian Trotskyist, C. L. R. James, whose theories of self-organization and working-class self-activity motivated a generation of West Indian, Afro-American, and American intellectuals.¹⁴ The growth of popular democracy in the years following the revolution represented a groundswell of support for the PRG and the very popular Maurice Bishop.

Though the mass organizations continued to grow and function independently of the party, this appeared to bother some members of the Central Committee. In an extraordinary document captured during the American intervention, the text of a report Bishop prepared and presented to the Central Committee of the NJM concerned the future direction of the revolution. The text, titled "Line of March for the Party," dated September 13, 1982, disclosed the emerging tensions within the Grenadian Revolution. Important for revealing the contradiction between vanguard and mass, Bishop's paper reviewed the progress of the revolution, assessed the balance of class forces, and offered suggestions for strengthening the Party. He noted that the Grenadian revolution was a

(eds.), *Maurice Bishop Speaks: The Grenada Revolution, 1979–1983* (New York: 1983), p. 84.

¹³ See, for example, Unión de Empresas de Medios de Propaganda, Adjunta al DOR del CC del PCC, *Organos del Poder Popular* (La Habana: 1979); Marta Hanecker, *Cuba: Dictatorship or Democracy* (Westport: 1980); and Archibald R. M. Ritter, "The Organs of People's Power and the Communist Party: The Nature of Cuban Democracy," in Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (eds.), *Cuba: Twenty-Five Years of Revolution, 1959–1984*, (New York: 1985), pp. 270–90.

¹⁴ "Socialism is nothing other than the self-organization of the proletariat carried to its ultimate limit." Grace Lee, Pierre Chaulieu and J. R. Johnson (C. L. R. James), *Facing Reality* (Detroit, 1958), p. 90; additional texts are C. L. R. James, "The Workers' Councils in Hungary," in *The Future in the Present* (London, 1977), pp. 175–82; Walter Rodney, "The African Revolution," lecture at the Symposium on C. L. R. James, University of Michigan, 31 March 1972; and Paul Buhle, "Marxism in the U.S.A." in Paul Buhle (ed.), *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 28–38.

... national-democratic, anti-imperialist Revolution, involving the alliance of many classes including sections of the small bourgeoisie but under the leadership and with the dominant role being played by the working people and particularly the working class, through their vanguard Party the NJM.¹⁵

The undeveloped nature of the productive forces produced a small and politically immature working class. As an agent of that class the role of the Party was primary in this stage of the national democratic revolution. Bishop called for a massive effort to politically and educationally mobilize the masses to consolidate this phase, and move on to the next one—the transition to socialism. The role of the NJM was to prepare the masses to rule, according to Bishop. In undertaking this activity, Bishop called for an expansion of party membership, while Coard wanted even more rigorous admissions procedures. This contradiction—between a vision of the party as an elite organization vs. that of a mass organization—was the central political contradiction of the revolution. Bishop's intent was to democratize the revolutionary party in order to link the party to the mass organizations; Coard's, to centralize the processes of decision-making and political participation. As one writer noted of the incipient Bishop/Coard rivalry,

Whereas Bishop was essentially pragmatic in his approach to policy formulation and inclined to make use of ad hoc structures and discussions, Coard was far more authoritarian in nature, preferring decision making in a highly structured environment. They largely complemented each other; while they certainly competed one against the other, it was largely beneficial. But Bishop saw him as a potential rival and Coard knew it.¹⁶

The party entered a period of stagnation and indecisiveness. The policy recommendations in Bishop's "Line of March" text were never implemented. In the Central Committee Meeting of September 14–16, 1983, the political contradictions surfaced into the open. The Coard forces complained of the collapse of the Party and mass organizations while accusing the Central Committee of "right opportunism." Bishop himself was charged with "one-manism" and autocratic control over the CC.

The Coard faction demanded a return to a strict level of "Leninist organization and discipline," greater ideological clarity, and new strategies and tactics

¹⁵ Maurice Bishop, "Line of March for the Party Presented to General Meeting of the Party on Monday 13 September 1982," in Paul Seabury and Walter McDougall (eds.), *The Grenada Papers*, pp. 59–88. The quotation is from p. 65.

¹⁶ Tony Thorndike, *Grenada: Politics, Economics and Society* (Boulder, 1985), p. 76.

for rebuilding the Party and advancing the revolution. As the CC succumbed to the Coard faction, Bishop withdrew. On September 25, 1983 the Coard forces completed the internal coup by proposing joint leadership between Coard and Bishop. Bishop would direct mass work and Coard would be responsible for party organization and development. Bishop would preside over the Central Committee while Coard would direct the Organizing Committee and the Political Bureau. Bishop's refusal to accept these conditions led to his house arrest. The rest of the story is already well known.

The political ramifications of Coard's ultra-leftism led to the demise and collapse of the New Jewel revolution. When Bishop went to the masses in October of 1983, it was already too late. The working people of Grenada had felt themselves betrayed by their leaders, and the arrest and execution of Bishop and his faction only contributed to their desertion of the revolution. The NJM's inability to resolve its internal contradictions rendered impossible the transforming of the subjective conditions of the revolution. Existing ideological and propaganda work did not sufficiently prepare the working people to defend it.

The United States / OECS Intervention:

"As we rejoice in your renewed freedom, let us not forget that there are still those who will do everything in their power to impose Communist dictatorship on the rest of us . . . "

Ronald Reagan, Speech to the Grenadian People, February 20, 1986

From its inception, the Grenadian revolution faced the wrath and ire of the United States, while the former colonial power, England, idly stood by and paid lip service to American policy in the region. The American intervention was the product of a set of pre-determined ideological and geopolitical considerations. First, the expansion of ties to Cuba and the Soviet bloc were viewed with great suspicion. Second, the international airport at Port Salines was seen as a possible Cuban / Soviet military base. Third was Grenada's geostrategic position amidst the major oil supply lines and facilities in the American *mare nostrum*. Fourth was the potential regionalization of the Grenadian revolution to the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands. And fifth, the impact of the Grenadian revolution on the other English-speaking black population, most notably the Afro-American population of the United States, was also a concern.

Almost immediately, the PRG faced a scolding from the United States. Jimmy Carter's ambassador to the Eastern Caribbean, Frank Ortiz, flew to

Grenada three weeks after the revolution and warned Bishop that the U.S. would “. . . view with displeasure any tendency on the part of Grenada to develop closer ties with Cuba.”¹⁷ In response to American strictures against improved Grenada-Cuba ties, Maurice Bishop gave his famous “In Nobody’s Backyard” speech:

Grenada is a sovereign and independent country, although a tiny speck on the world map, and we expect all countries to strictly respect our independence just as we will respect theirs. No country has the right to tell us what to do or how to run our country or who to be friendly with. We certainly would not attempt to tell any other country what to do. We are not in anybody’s backyard, and we are definitely not for sale. Anybody who thinks they can bully us or threaten us clearly has no understanding, idea, or clue as to what material we are made of. They clearly have no idea of the tremendous struggles which our people have fought over the past seven years. Though small and poor, we are proud and determined. We would sooner give up our lives before we compromise, sell out, or betray our sovereignty, our independence, our integrity, our manhood, and the right of our people to national self-determination and social progress.¹⁸

Cuban aid took many forms. More than \$33.6 million (U.S.) was supplied in equipment and personnel to the international airport, the largest donation. In addition, doctors, dentists, teachers and other “international workers” appeared within months of the insurrection. Moreover, confiscated documents present evidence that an Eastern European presence developed, including Czech military and East German intelligence advisers. The People’s Republic of Korea gave \$12 million in free military assistance in 1983. It is important to point out that an ongoing internal destabilization had begun soon after the establishment of the PRG, and military aid to the regime was perceived as necessary to counter the very real threat of an American invasion.

Following Ronald Reagan’s election, U.S.-Grenada relations worsened. Covert action and other forms of destabilization began to occur. A review of these events is necessary to understand how the escalation of destabilization culminated in the U.S. invasion. In the fall of 1979 two of the most important trade unions—the Seamen’s and Waterfront Workers Union (SWWU) and that of the electrical workers, the Technical and Allied Workers Union (TAWU)—attempted to call a strike to protest the income tax. Though the strike did not materialize, disruptions of all sorts continued—work refusal,

¹⁷ EPICA Task Force, *Grenada*, p. 61.

¹⁸ Bruce Marcus and Michael Taber (eds.), *Maurice Bishop Speaks*, p. 31.

pilferage, and other forms of economic sabotage. In November, the TAWU's leader ordered a power shutdown, a prelude to a plot to burn down the capital at St. George's. The leaders of these two unions—Chris Stuart, Eric Pierre, Stanley Roberts, and Christopher Strachan—had all been trained by the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), a strong anti-communist organization with known CIA ties.¹⁹ In November, the PRG detained a group of counter-revolutionaries led by Wilton de Ravinere, a police officer, and Winston Whyte, a member of the ultra-right United People's Party. The group also included members of the "Budhlall gang"—a criminal clique involved in the growth and sale of "ganja." These elements were linked to Stanley Cyrus, a Grenadian who taught Spanish at Howard University. Cyrus was suspected of having links to the CIA; on his return to Grenada he became involved in a series of plots to overthrow the PRG with the assistance of the "Budhlall gang."²⁰ On June 19, 1980 thousands of Grenadians gathered at a rally to honor the nation's heroes. A bomb went off under the speaker's platform, killing three young women and injuring one hundred. A former sergeant of the People's Revolutionary Army was linked to the bombing. When security forces attempted to arrest him a shootout ensued, and he was killed. At his home, a mini-arsenal was found. Throughout 1980 and 1981 bombings continued, while internal security attempted to grapple with subversion.²¹

The Cuban-Soviet-Grenada-Nicaragua-Surinam axis was at the core of the

¹⁹On trade union subversion in the Caribbean, see Jeffrey Harrod, *Trade Union Foreign Policy: A Study of the Activities of American and British Trade Unions in the Caribbean* (Garden City, New York: 1972); Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969), subversion in the hemisphere is covered in pp. 304-452; George Morris, *CIA and American Labor* (New York, 1967), pp. 88-91; documents the destabilization of Cheddi Jagan's election in Guyana during 1964-1965. The early counterrevolutionary incidents are covered in detail in EPICA Task Force, *Grenada*, pp. 66-68.

²⁰The activities of the Budhlall gang are given careful scrutiny in "Grenada: What Went Wrong? An Interview with Don Rojas," in *The Black Nation*, IV:1 (Summer / Fall 1984), pp. 15-24. The entire destabilization campaign is covered in a remarkable analysis by Ellen Ray and Bill Schaap, "U.S. Crushes Caribbean Jewel," *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, 20 (Winter 1984), pp. 3-20; on the Rastafarian role in the revolution and counterrevolution, see Horace Campbell, "The Rastafarians in the Eastern Caribbean," *Caribbean Quarterly*, XXVI:4 (December 1980), pp. 42-61, but especially pp. 50-55.

²¹Internal and external subversion of the revolution is given an extensive treatment in "Dossier on Propaganda destabilization; Economic Aggression; Political / Diplomatic and Industrial destabilization; Terrorist and Counter-Revolutionary Activities; and Mercenary threats and military manoeuvres [sic]," New Jewel Movement, n. p. I am grateful to the staff of TRANSAFRICA for allowing me access to this document.

U.S. concern in the region. Grenada, it was perceived, was becoming "another Cuba" and had to be stopped. Cuba, the pearl of the Antilles, stood on the northern border of the American *mare nostrum*, Grenada on its southern flank; Nicaragua had established a revolutionary regime on the American continent, and Surinam had gained a toehold on the South American continent. The Reagan doctrine of "reverse containment" emerged from the hemispheric realities of revolution on the borders of the U.S.—not in some distant far-off lands. Not only must Communism be contained, it must be rolled back at all costs.

The new international airport was a particular threat to the balance of power in the hemisphere. Though the airport had been sanctioned as strictly for tourism by U.S. allies, Canada and England, to handle larger aircraft and avoid the mandatory stopover in Barbados or Trinidad, the Reagan administration viewed it as a potential Cuban / Soviet base equipped to handle advanced combat aircraft, helicopter gunships, and the like.

The PRG had pointed out that Barbados and Trinidad possessed similar facilities. Even tiny St. Lucia doubled its tourist traffic following the construction of an international airport. As has already been pointed out, tourism was seen as the essential economic tool in lifting Grenada from her underdevelopment; but the airport itself suffered from cost-overruns. Confiscated documents indicate that construction costs had drained the Treasury by 1983, diverting funds from other projects, and led to increased pressure for more Soviet aid. The airport was of far less concern to Grenada's neighbors, as we shall see. Following completion of the airport with U.S. aid, the State Department finally admitted that it had no military purposes.²²

The geopolitical and geostrategic considerations behind the invasion also loomed heavily. In a 1983 speech before the Council on Foreign Relations, U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger contended that the United States

²² On the international airport at Port Salines and its importance to the economy see "Airport Special" Permanent Mission of Grenada to North America, *Grenada News* (April–May 1981), 8 pages; on the debate of alleged Cuban / Soviet uses of the airport see two interesting articles by Joseph Treaster, "Airport is Ready, but Grenada is Not," *The New York Times* (July 25, 1984) and "New Airport, Still Unfinished, Is Open in Grenada," *The New York Times* (October 29, 1984). Treaster noted in the latter article, "Many Grenadians say that they are not sure what the Cubans had in mind, but that the earliest studies by British engineers nearly thirty years ago always saw the airport as a boom to tourism and development." The correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, Alex Brummer, pointed out that the United States had military designs on the airport in a post-invasion Grenada; "Port Salines airport to be permanent U.S. base?" *The Guardian Weekly* (November 20, 1983).

must not only resist Soviet incursions in the Third World but must also

. . . seek to reverse the geographic expansion of Soviet control and presence, particularly when it threatens a vital interest or further erodes the geostrategic position of the United States and its allies.²³

"Geostrategic position" refers to the assumption within conservative military circles that the Soviet Union would cripple the West by gaining control of critical sea lanes and securing a critical stranglehold over Western economics by "interdicting" these sea routes. This thinking was also reflected by Admiral Robert P. McKenzie, who pointed out that the region was vital to American interests since all of the country's imports, including oil, must pass these sea lanes on their way to U.S. ports. He stated the Soviets knew this and with the establishment of Soviet bases in Cuba in the west and Grenada in the east, it was important to realize that Grenada was ". . . strategically located in a region where the sea lanes coverage."²⁴ Admiral Thomas H. Moorer (ret.), Chairman of Nixon's Joint Chiefs of Staff, put the geostrategic considerations in a much clearer perspective. He argued that the international airport was unacceptable because "it would be a staying field for Soviet and Libyan aircraft" en route to Central America.²⁵ Finally, General Wallace Nutting, chief of the U.S. Readiness Command, said:

When MIGs can operate out of Grenada and Nicaragua, as well (as Cuba), it will enable someone to cover most of the oil production facilities in the Caribbean, all oil refineries there, plus the sea lanes through which crude moves to the U.S. and through the Panama Canal. That is a major potential threat to the U.S.²⁶

Is it any wonder then when Eugenia Charles phoned Reagan, the U.S. would move unhesitatingly to put an end to this so-called Soviet base within America's *mare nostrum*?

Grenada's neighbors claimed they had the most to fear from the installation of the revolutionary government. As early as 1970, the socialist intelligentsia of the English-speaking West Indies held a secret meeting at Rat Island, off St.

²³Quoted in Michael T. Klare, "Grenada Syndrome," *The Nation* (November 12, 1983).

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵"How Oil Fueled the Invasion of Grenada," *Business Week* (November 7, 1983). On the importance of the Windward / Leeward passages for American trade, see United States Department of Commerce, Maritime Administration, *Essential United States Foreign Trade Routes* (Washington, D.C.: 1975).

²⁶Quoted in, "How Oil Fueled the Invasion of Grenada."

Lucia. It was called following the Trinidadian Black Power disturbances in order to review the possibilities for social and political revolution in the region. It was composed of revolutionaries from all over the region, including Bishop and Coard from Grenada, Trevor Munroe of Jamaica, Georg Odum of St. Lucia, Tim Hector of Antigua, Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent, Bill Riviere of Dominica, and others who met to sponsor a series of forums throughout the region to put socialism on the agenda. These meetings continued throughout the 1970s. In an extraordinary document, provided one dismisses its anti-Communist bias and pro-U.S. sympathies, Albert Xavier, editor of the independent newspaper *Torchlight* (closed down in late 1979 by the PRG for fostering counterrevolutionary sentiments and attitudes), revealed that a series of secret meetings had been held in Grenada following the establishment of the PRG. Mr. Xavier noted,

In November 1979, Mr. Bishop called his first meeting—a successor to the Rat Island Conference. The participants in that meeting were chosen from St. Lucia, Dominica and of course, Grenada. At the end of the deliberations, the conferees signed what they called “the St. George’s Accord.” The most significant article of that agreement was that nations of the three island states should be able to travel to members states without a passport. This article was exploited by those in the communist network as a means of deploying their forces in a more unified fashion throughout the islands.²⁷

There was indeed reason to be concerned. Most of the governments of the Eastern Caribbean had fallen into conservative hands. Their regimes often engaged in the subtle repression of the opposition, as in Dominica and St. Vincent, or were threatened by mercenary action. In a curious sidelight to the Grenadian Revolution, a motley crew of Nazis and Ku Klux Klansmen planned to invade Dominica in 1981. After the discovery of the invasion by the FBI, Prime Minister Charles requested a regional security treaty from the United States.²⁸

Grenada was also seen as a staging point for island-wide subversion. The

²⁷ Albert Xavier, “Plotting that had the Eastern Caribbean on Edge,” *The Wall Street Journal* (December 31, 1983); on the development of the left in the region see Tad Szulc, “Radical Winds in the Caribbean,” *The New York Times Magazine* (May 25, 1980); the Argentinian anthropologist Andres Serbin has written two important articles on the left in the region and the wider implications that had held, “La Evolución de la Ideología de la Izquierda Caribeña,” *Nueva Sociedad*, 61 (Julio-Agosto 1982), pp. 55–65 and “Las Experiencias Recientes del Socialismo Caribeño,” *Nueva Sociedad*, 63 (Noviembre-Diciembre 1982), pp. 95–102. *Nueva Sociedad* is published in San José, Costa Rica.

²⁸ “Klansmen are among 10 Indicted in Plot on Caribbean Island Nation,” *The New York Times* (May 8, 1981); “Dominica Unsettled in the Wake of Thwarted Invasion,”

Soviet Union had constructed a 75-kilowatt transmitter at Beausejour which would allow free and unhampered radio transmission. In addition, with five percent of its population under arms and another five percent capable of military activity, the PRA and militia outsized the combined defense forces of the Eastern Caribbean. The OECS was formed in response to the Grenadian threat, and in order to secure American economic and military assistance. In addition to the destabilization activities in which the U.S. had been engaged for three years prior to the invasion, it had also initiated a set of massive military maneuvers in October 1981 at Vieques island, off the coast of Puerto Rico. Labelled "Ocean Venture '81," the maneuvers staged a mock invasion of Amber and the Amberdines, an undisguised reference to Grenada and the Grenadines. The invasion involved the rescue of American hostages and the establishment of a regime favorable to the American way of life. It was these maneuvers and a host of related activities that led to the increasing role of military and security considerations within the Grenadian revolution. In a speech broadcast over Radio Free Grenada March 25, 1983, and monitored by the CIA's *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, Prime Minister Maurice Bishop alluded to the following steps in the escalation of destabilization. It is important to quote this text in full to grasp the full significance of the counterrevolution, and the convergence of internal and external forces hostile to the revolution:

Firstly, that a team of counterrevolutionaires, Grenadians and non-Grenadians have been meeting more frequently in recent months.

Secondly, that opportunists and reactionary elements who aspire to grab power have begun to resolve their leadership difference with the aim of creating a more united counterrevolutionary front.

Thirdly, that their coordination with the Central Intelligence Agency—the CIA—has stepped up.

Fourthly, that they have already received direct assistance from the CIA in the form of money, arms and training, and they have also received offers of transportation, logistical support and supplies and an undertaking that immediately on launching their attack their declared counterrevolutionary government will receive United States recognition.

Fifthly, we have been able to discover the names and full background of the main CIA case officer responsible for coordinating the present plot. We

The New York Times (June 7, 1981); a second coup attempt occurred in December: "Coup Attempt Fails in Dominica," *The New York Times* (December 29, 1981); the security implications of these attempts are covered in the article by Ellen Ray and Bill Schaap, p. 5.

know his name. We know where he has worked before. We know what his previous activities have been and know which other revolutionary processes he has attempted to subvert in recent times.

Sixth, another CIA case officer involved in this operation is known to have been involved in directing and masterminding the operations to assassinate the leadership that resulted in the murderous June 19th bomb blast.

Seventhly, these elements have established direct links with the Cuban exile group which was responsible for the Air Cubana disaster and also with Somozista counterrevolutionary elements who are right now involved in the invasion of Nicaragua.

Eighthly, with the assistance of the CIA, these elements have been to get some of the criminal elements which (?to be) [sic] used in the invasion of our country, trained in Miami in some of the same camps in which the Somozista "contras" and various other mercenaries have been trained.

Ninthly, as part of their planning process, the CIA helped to allocate different sets of these criminal counterrevolutionaries for the physical attack against Nicaragua and Grenada, and they decided several weeks ago to attack during this precise period in order to coincide with massive military maneuvers taking place in our region at this time and as a culmination of the major propaganda offensive of Reagan and his ceaseless comments against the revolutionary processes in the region.

The tenth point, the main base of operations and activities of these elements is one of our neighboring territories only a few miles away from Grenada.

Eleventh, as a result of all this (words indistinct) [sic] we have been able, not only to uncover the actual plan to overthrow our government and turn back our revolution, but also the approximate number of men they hope to use, the approximate number and type of arms they possess and the kind of logistical support they hope to receive. We know comrades the target they intend to destroy. We know many of the (?forces) [sic] they intend to arrange, those they plan to kill and how they plan to strike terror and fear among the broad masses.

And twelfth and finally, it is necessary to (?reemphasize) [sic], to doubly emphasize that we know the actual period in the near future that they are hoping to use to launch their murderous attack. (Words indistinct) [sic] considering the clear and disturbing patterns of United States intervention and aggression in our region and the world, the largescale invasion of Nicaragua now taking place, we have concluded that the danger we perceive in this period is real and imminent.

When the President of the United States of America, who is also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, states publicly and clearly that tiny Grenada is a threat to the national security of the mighty and powerful United States of America and when his top advisors and military personnel

indicate that the time has come to put teeth into their rhetoric, then it is clear that Goliath has finally turned his full attention to David.²⁹

In a last-ditch effort to improve relations with the United States, Bishop undertook an American tour in 1983, where the Reagan administration rebuffed him. It was during this tour that the Bishop spoke to several thousand Americans at Hunter College in New York. In concluding, it takes little imagination to realize the significance of that speech for Afro-Americans:

I want to tell you about that one (a report)[sic] so that you can reflect on it. That secret report made this point: that the Grenada revolution is in one sense even worse—I'm using their language—than the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions because the people of Grenada and the leadership of Grenada speak English, and therefore can communicate directly with the people of the United States. But I want to tell you what that same report said that also made us very dangerous. That is the people and the leadership of Grenada are predominantly Black. They said that 95% of our population is Black—and they have the correct statistic—and if we have 95% of predominantly African origin in our country, then we can have a dangerous appeal to 30 million Black people in the U.S. Now that aspect of the report, clearly, is one of the most sensible.³⁰

Most sensible, *indeed*.

²⁹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, March 29, 1983.

³⁰ Maurice Bishop, "Maurice Bishop Speaks to U.S. Working People," in Bruce Marcus and Michael Taber (eds.), *Maurice Bishop Speaks*, p. 299. Bishop's potential influence on the large Afro-American population cannot be ignored in light of the secret Carter-Brezinski National Security Memorandum of 1978. Cf. Presidential Review Memorandum / National Security Council-46, "Black Africa and the U.S. Black Movement." TRANSAFRICA obtained this document in 1978.